

Mr. James Reston

Dear Scotty,

Your April 28th article on newsmen and intelligence, which belatedly came to my attention on May 10th via ^{a reprint in} the London Times, prompts me to write you in hopes of clarifying a few of the points raised in your article, and to offer my views on others.

It was your question to Bill Colby at lunch over two years ago that started us off on a chain of reconsiderations and actions which ultimately led to our new policy on newsmen and clergymen which I announced on 11 February 1976. I think where we now are is a great improvement over where we were when you asked ~~by~~ my predecessor about newsmen and intelligence. We have you to thank for having been the catalyst to force the Agency to reassess the practices of the past. That is one of the reasons I am distressed to find you are still ill at ease.

Another reason I am distressed that you continue to have strong feelings on the subject is the response I have had to our statement from some of the top men in your profession. Recently in New York a senior national media man (DCI: Julian Goodman) told me that on the whole, he felt that our statement was all that could be demanded of us. I was gratified to hear that. As a new arrival in the intelligence business, I feel that I am not laden with all the professional intelligence officer's baggage and preconceptions; but I, too, think that is all that can be demanded of us. I have talked about this reform before the ASNE and the

I cannot say that I detect total happiness but that I do feel that there is an awareness that we have honestly tried to come up with a good solution to a very rough problem.

In your article you note that our continuing practices, as reported and commented upon by the Senate Select Committee, raise "troubling questions." Your ~~article~~ ^{article also} suggests that we make known, at least in private to the organizations concerned, the identities of individuals and other entities who have cooperated with us. Let me address this latter point first.

Scotty, I simply cannot reveal the identities of any sources who have worked with us. ^{From} For a profession whose members will go to jail rather than reveal a source, I ask understanding. But beyond that I have a ^{very clear} legislative responsibility ^{under the law} to protect our sources, and the President restated and reemphasized that responsibility in his recent executive order. Even more "troubling questions" would evolve if I were forced to reveal the identities of those patriotic people and organizations who, in good faith, ^{and different times} undertook to assist their Government in an individual capacity with the understanding and assurance that their contributions would remain forever secret.

I am also firm in my belief that there is nothing iniquitous about our continuing practices. ^{I can assure you we are not trying to suppress} There are two aspects of this which seem to concern you, the first being the apparent discrepancy between our assurances that we were no longer using staff members of the U.S. major media and the Senate Committee "findings" that two such relationships continued to exist at the time of my February 11th policy statement. We disagree with this "finding" ~~and protest it~~. The Committee made the finding working from brief and necessarily highly sanitized case summaries, and over our protest chose to place these two cases in the category which Bill Colby had excluded from operational use not long after his discussion with you on this subject.

I am convinced that we are in the right on this, even if I can't convince our critics.

On the other aspect of our continuing practices - our need to continue some ~~of the~~ existing relationships ^{and to seek others -} - I stress that none of these ~~have or~~ will have any regular or formal relationship with any general circulation or mass U.S. media organization. Nor will we direct them to attempt to publish anything in any U.S. media. Free lancers who may cooperate with us in some way obviously are free to publish their own material wherever they can get the best return. We cannot interfere with that process.

This leads me to comment on your bewilderment as to why President Ford doesn't simply "issue an order" to "stop the practice" of our making use of individuals who choose to assist us, and whom I have invited to assist us on a voluntary and unpaid basis should they see their way clear to do so. In my February 11th statement, I recognized the special status afforded the press under the Constitution. I'm sure you would agree that this special status exists, but at what point would you begin to infringe upon the rights of the individual? Certainly, many members of the press would support your ideas - but I am equally convinced that many would oppose any policy which they might feel would be an intrusion of their individual rights, an infringement of the freedom you are trying to protect.

Even the Senate Select Committee recognized this problem, and though they did not address it in their report specifically in terms of newsmen they do make the point that they do not recommend legislation prohibiting the ~~operational exploitation~~ ^{cooperation with the CIA} of individuals in private institutions. The Committee viewed such legislation as both unenforceable and in itself an intrusion on the privacy and integrity of those concerned.

The CIA will adhere diligently to the restrictions I have placed on our relationships with newsmen. I can assure you of that. In any case, the question of "fall out" and "misleading the public" is not an issue, and has never been a significant factor in our past relationships with American newsmen. We simply have not worked with these people in that way.

I seek your understanding of the degree of change that has taken place--and I note your role in it. Although we cannot conduct our country's intelligence business the way each critic would like it to be conducted, I hope you will come to the conclusion we have made significant changes.

Sincerely,

George Bush
Director